

## GENERAL NOTES

**A shift in nesting habitat by a population of Common Eiders.**—The Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*) of the North American Atlantic coasts nests in forest, shrub, and grassland habitats (Gross, *Wilson Bull.*, 56:15–26, 1944; Choate, *J. Wild. Mgmt.*, 31:769–777, 1967; Bourget, *Auk*, 90:809–820, 1973; Reed, *Service de la Faune du Québec Bull. no. 18*, 1973). However, Paynter (*Ecology*, 32:497–507, 1951) reported that in 1947 the population of eiders nesting on Kent Island (a partially spruce- and fir-covered island in the Bay of Fundy), New Brunswick, Canada, was concentrated at the treeless southern end, at the expense of the north-end woodland. Twenty-six years later, in June 1973, I was intrigued to find that the bulk of eiders nesting on Kent Island were congregated under the trees. A brief census in areas of both forest and field (where ragweed, *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*, dominated) reinforced this impression.

I counted eider nests in 10 sample areas, five in forest and five in fields. Each of these 50 by 100 m (5,000 m<sup>2</sup>) quadrats was set out with a 100 m side running along the border between vegetation and rocky coastline and was then systematically covered. The eiders' preference for nesting under forest ( $\bar{x}$  19.0  $\pm$  8.9 nests per 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>; 38.0 nests per ha) rather than within fields ( $\bar{x}$  1.2  $\pm$  0.7 nests per 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>; 2.4 nests per ha) was clear-cut, despite the considerable variation among quadrats from the same habitat type. In contrast to the eiders, a census of Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) nests showed a marked preference for open field ( $\bar{x}$  57.6  $\pm$  26.2 nests per 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>; 115.2 nests per ha) over forest ( $\bar{x}$  13.8  $\pm$  6.1 nests per 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>; 27.6 nests per ha). The gull nests in the forest quadrats were concentrated along a narrow coastal strip; eider nests were farther inland under the heavy tree canopy.

Two lines of evidence suggest that pressure from gulls in open terrain caused the eider population to shift habitat between 1947 and 1973. Along the nearby coast of Maine, gull predation on eider nests decreases with increasing nesting cover for the eiders (Choate, *op. cit.*; Bourget, *op. cit.*). On the treeless Razade Islands in the Saint Lawrence estuary, an increase in Herring Gull nests (843 to 1,717), between 1938 and 1966, was accompanied by a decrease in eider nests (1,412 to 649) (Reed, *op. cit.*). Reed's explanation for the decrease in eider nests on the grassy Razades could hold for the shift of Kent Island birds to forest, i.e. "direct expulsion of eiders by aggressive territorial gulls [and/] or through reduced recruitment of eiders as a result of predation on their nests by gulls." The shift by eiders to woodland on Kent Island may not have occurred earlier, because, at least in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the population of gulls nesting on the island was still rather low (Townsend, *Can. Field Nat.*, 37:141–144, 1923).

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**Collision between a vulture and an aircraft at an altitude of 37,000 feet.**—On 29 November 1973, a Rüppell's Griffon (*Gyps rueppellii*) collided with a commercial aircraft at 37,000 ft over Abijan, Ivory Coast, western Africa. The altitude is that recorded by the pilot shortly after the impact, which damaged one of the aircraft's engines and caused it to be shut down. The plane landed safely at Abijan without further incident. The remains of the vulture consisted of five complete and 15 partial feathers from the